

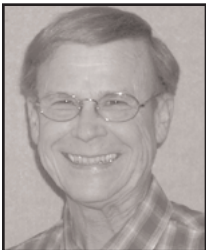
THE GAVEL

*The Official Newsletter
of the Georgia Council of Probate Court Judges*

Volume 10, Number 2

April 2002

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT



The legislative session is almost over. Thanks to our legislative chairs we are not in too bad a shape. We owe a debt of gratitude to each of the chairs and other volunteers who worked so very hard keeping some of the proposed legislation from impacting us more negatively. Thanks

Mike Bracewell, Mike Greene, LaVerne Ogletree, Judy Mullis, Floyd Propst, Marion Guess, and of course Marla Moore and her staff for all of your efforts.

We have contracted with the firm Boller, Sewell & Segars, Inc. as our lobbyist. I think this will prove to be a very beneficial move. Mark Middleton is our representative. His email address is: mark@middletonlaw.net.

We have completed the Pro Se video. Thanks to Judge Guess, Judge Tate, Judge Brown, Judge McCoy, Judge Propst, Judge Self, Marla Moore and Robbie Foote for their hard work. It will prove to be an asset for all of us who handle so many pro se cases. There was a lot of re-write

done by Judge Tate. Most of the concern was how to make a video that would be general enough to cover all cases. I think that our team has done a marvelous job of accomplishing our goals.

We are near the end of my term as your president. I have not completed nearly as much as I'd hoped. We have had a good year, however, in spite of my shortcomings. We have had the first year ever with 100% of the dues being paid (thanks to Judge Cranford). We have had two leadership conferences (thanks to Judge Baker). We have had our second strategic planning session (thanks to Marla and staff). We have regenerated the district meetings with a new structure (thanks to Judge Cason), and we have updated and reprinted our "personal representative" booklets (thanks to Judge Propst).

Many others have added to our efforts to make this a good year. Thanks to each of you for your hard work.

Del

Calendar of Events

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| April 16 | CPCJ Executive Committee Mtg.
Augusta (Radisson)
6:30 p.m. |
| April 17-19 | Judge's Spring Seminar
Augusta (Radisson) |
| June 15-19 | COAG Summer Seminar
Jekyll (Jekyll Inn) |
| September 13 | 3rd Annual Indigent Defense
Consortium, TBA |
| November 12-15 | Judge's Fall Seminar
Savannah (Westin) |
| December 10-13 | Clerk's Training Seminar
Savannah (Hyatt Regency) |

From Legislative Representative Mark Middleton

On behalf of all of us at Boller, Sewell & Segars, I thank the Council of Probate Court Judges for the opportunity to be your legislative representative. In the short time that I have been on the job, I am impressed by your collective knowledge, and by the goodwill that you have earned over the years in the legislature.

As we bring the 2002 Session to a successful conclusion, I am especially grateful to your legislative Co-Chairs Judge Mike Bracewell and Judge Mike Greene. They have done a great job of introducing me to your issues in a relatively short period of time.

I am looking forward to having the opportunity to meet each of you after the session. Please contact me at 404-806-0808 if I can ever be of assistance to you.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to be of service to you.

Sincerely, Mark M. Middleton

Council of Probate Court Judges

Who We Are

The Council of Probate Court Judges (OCGA § 15-9-15) was created to further the improvement of the probate courts and the administration of justice. The Council is composed of judges and senior judges of the probate courts. Council policy is set by an executive committee comprised of the president, vice president, secretary-treasurer, and chairs of the standing committees. The committee carries out the administrative duties of the council. The Administrative Office of the Courts provides staff assistance to the Council and its committees.

The Year's Activities

After a successful Strategic Planning meeting in the Fall of 2000, the executive board members set an aggressive agenda for 2001. Below is a brief report of the Council's activities and the services provided to its members in 2001.

CPCJ Meetings

The Council met four times during 2001, three of which were in conjunction with the County Officer's Association of Georgia. Judicial training at each meeting

was planned by the Probate Judges Training Council. Topics included: Judicial Writing, New Case Law, Rules of Professional Conduct for Lawyers, Open Records, General Probate Knowledge, and a special presentation on stress relief and personal development from Jeff Justice.

Publications

The Gavel, the Probate Council Newsletter, was produced and sent to all probate judges four times this year. The Council also completed and distributed revisions to the Probate Judges Benchbook. In addition, the Council purchased copies of Judicial Outreach on a Shoestring, The Handbook for Georgia Legislators, and the Georgia Probate Laws and Rules Annotated for all members of the Council.

Legislation

The Probate Council was an active presence at the legislative session. With the aid of the Council's leadership and active members, the CPCJ presented a number of key pieces of legislation before the general assembly. The revised Probate Fee-Schedule passed, simplifying and increasing

revenues for the probate courts. The Council also introduced legislation concerning the non-partisan election of probate judges. Although this bill failed to gain the necessary support needed to pass, the Council will continue to pursue this legislation throughout 2002.

Other Momentous CPCJ Actions

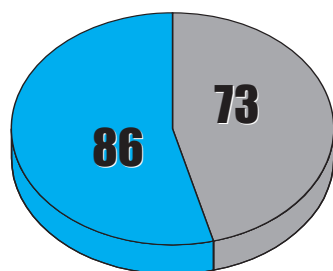
The Council created the membership committee to aid with the orientation of new judges and to sponsor receptions for the members of the council at all quarterly meetings. The District system was also strengthened in 2001 through the election of district officers and the organization of regular district meetings. Amendments to the bylaws at the November meeting solidified the existence of this district structure.

In October, the Council provided leadership training to members of the Probate Judges Training Council and the executive committee. This Probate Judges Leadership Institute, conducted by noted instructor, Dr. Pat Murell, will serve as a foundation for future training sessions and will aid in the improvement of quality

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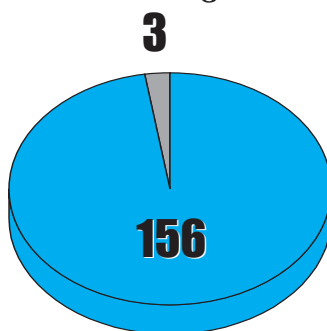
Basic Make-up of Probate Court Judges

Male/Female Ratio



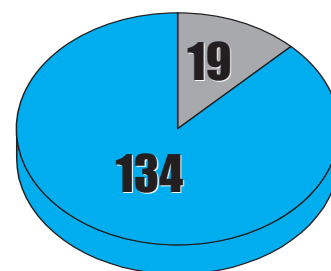
Female Male

Racial Background



White Black

Attorney-Non Attorney Ratio



Non-Attorney Attorney

Annual Report Calendar Year 2001

instruction provided by facilitators.

Finally, the Council held its second annual strategic planning meeting to reevaluate the progress of last year's strategic plan, and to develop new initiatives to make

the Council more effective. In depth reports from this meeting were printed in the Gavel and updates on the CPCJ's progress will be provided, with help from the AOC.

New Pro Se Litigant Video in Final Stages of Production

The Probate Pro Se Litigant video, Presenting your Case in Probate Court is currently nearing completion and will soon be available for distribution. Given the continued increase of Pro Se Litigants throughout the state's court system, the video provides pertinent information for the procedures and expectations for presenting a case in probate court. Although the video tracks an adult guardianship case from start to finish, the information can be easily applied to all probate court hearings.

The committee members that have worked hard on developing the script for this project are Judge

Marion Guess (Chair, DeKalb County) Judge Susan Tate (Clarke County), Judge Lillis Brown (Rockdale County), Judge Darin McCoy (Evans County), Judge Del Buttrill (Henry County), and Judge Floyd Propst (Fulton County). The committee also sought suggestions and advice from Judge Bill Self (Bibb County) and numerous other probate judges throughout the state. Through their work with the Administrative Office of the Courts and Dan Sperling Video and Film, Inc., the Probate Pro Se Video promises to be a first rate, high quality production for all constituents of the court.

District Meetings

2ND DISTRICT MEETING

The Southwest Georgia Probate Judges held regular monthly meetings on January 17 and February 21, 2002 at the Grand Island Country Club in Albany. Judge Aileen Dunn presided and appointed committees for both nominations and the annual Christmas dinner. Judge Barwick presented a program concerning the Georgia Legal Services Program and its involvement in the probate court, introducing Staff Attorney Cheryl Griffin. Ms. Griffin lives in Colquitt County and works in the Albany office, which handles nineteen surrounding counties. Ms. Griffin described several types of probate court cases in which legal services can become involved, as well as family violence cases, including temporary pro-

tective orders and divorces. The office has recently been awarded a family violence grant, Griffin said, which also allows staff attorneys to represent individuals in drawing certain wills and handling some probates of wills. Safety continues to be their primary concern, she said, so that situations involving homelessness, violence, or loss of custody have to receive first priority.

Judge Nation had a grandson born @ St. Mary's in Athens:

Grayson Douglas Stoudenmire
DOB: 2-9-2002 @ 1:30 AM

Tim and Penni Nation Stoudenmire are the HAPPY parents and Jerry and Beverly Nation are the HAPPY grandparents (maternal).

Some Interesting STATISTICS

Number of Judges:

158 (Plus 1 Acting Judge in Emanuel County)

Number Handling Traffic Cases:

89

Number Handling Vital Records:

98

Number Handling Elections:

106

Number Serving as Chief Magistrates:

19

Number Serving as Magistrates:

3

Number Serving as Municipal Judges:

5

Number Serving as Senior Probate Judges:

11

District Meetings

1ST DISTRICT MEETING

Members of the First District met on January 31, 2002 at Captain Joe's Restaurant in Jesup, GA. Those Probate Judges and their guests in attendance were: Judge Marcus Sweat with his wife, Lucille (Ware Cty), Judge Joe Boatright (Bacon Cty), Judge Sam Davis (Bryan Cty), Judge Lee DeLoach (Bullock Cty), Judge Bernice Gilder with her clerk Ms. Debbie Howes (Glynn Cty), Judge Johnnie Crews (Brantley Cty), Judge Christine Burch (Wayne Cty), Judge Hallman (Appling Cty), Judge Marie Middleton (Long Cty), Judge Darin McCoy (Evans Cty), and Judge Brenda Howard (Pierce Cty).

The participants at the meeting discussed various subjects that are of concern to the probate court. Temporary Guardianships, Probate of Wills, and Incompetency issues were all topics of discussion. Judge McCoy also gave a brief legislative update, stating that SB32 passed the Senate by a vote of 47-6.

The first district meeting concluded with the election of it's new officers:

Director: Brenda Howard
Secretary: Marie Middleton
Treasurer: Sharon McCall
Training Council Member:
Sam Davis

A tentative date for the next meeting will be on Tuesday April 16, 2002 in Augusta.

Best Wishes

Best wishes to Judge Bernice Gilder of Glynn County who is recovering from heart surgery. Judge Gilder is currently in St. Vincent's Hospital in Jacksonville, Florida recovering from an unexpected Quintuple-bypass surgery. Doctor's report that her recovery is progressing as planned and she should be more active within the next few weeks. Judge Gilder can receive cards in care of St. Vincent's Hospital, P.O. Box 2982, Jacksonville, FL 32203. Please keep her in your thoughts and prayers.

3RD DISTRICT PROBATE JUDGE'S ASSOCIATION MINUTES OF MEETING - JANUARY 24, 2002

The Third District Probate Judges met at the Ramada Inn in Americus Georgia, on Thursday, January 24, 2002. Those Judges Present were: Kenneth Van Horn (Chattahoochee Cty), Sara Paravis (Crawford Cty), Martha Hartley (Harris Cty), John Wheaton (Lee Cty), Mack McCarty (Macon Cty), James R. Welch (Marion Cty), Deborah Hunnicutt (Peach Cty), Judy Reeves (Sumter Cty), J. Slade Johnson (Talbot Cty), and Lorene Tindol (Webster Cty).

After lunch, Judge Reeves, district director, called the meeting to order. The minutes of the December 4, 2001, meeting were unanimously approved.

A motion was made by Judge McCarty, seconded by Judge Johnson, that a bank account for the 3rd district be opened by the treasurer, with the signature of the treasurer being the only required signature. The motion was voted upon and carried unanimously. Money from this account will be used for various district projects. The members of the 3rd district also decided that flowers should be sent by the district to judges and their immediate families only, with cards sent to others when

appropriate. Members should contact Judge Reeves when they feel either should be sent.

SB32 was discussed by the group. It was decided that each probate judge could contact their legislators with their wishes concerning this bill.

Judge Reeves reminded the group of the COAG meeting in February and the elections seminar March 24-27 in Augusta. Judge Wheaton made a motion to adjourn; Judge Welch seconded; the motion was unanimously approved.

6TH DISTRICT ANNUAL MEETING

The 6th District Probate Judges met in Barnesville, Georgia, February 11, 2002, at the famous "Pastime Grill." Judge Cason, District Director of the 6th district Probate Judges, brought the group up-to-date on all the legislation concerning the Probate Court. The district members also discussed possible methods of making all probate judges more aware of pending legislation in a more timely manner. A nominating committee of Judge Betty Cason, Judge Mary Cranford and Judge DeWitt Simonton were appointed to nominate new officers for the 6th district. The next meeting will be held during the April Conference in Augusta.

The Probate Judges were greatly honored to have Marla Moore and Robbie Foote with the Administrative Office of the Courts, as well as Fred Roney, District Court Administrator of the 6th Judicial District attending the meeting.

9TH DISTRICT

Met in Forsyth County Probate Court on January 16, 2002. Ten Judges were present. They discussed different matters pertaining to probate court, specifically pistol permits and marriage license permits.

We adjourned and had lunch at the Buckhead Brewery.

8th District

Met February 27, 2002 in Hopkinsville, GA at the local Steakhouse. We discussed the nominations committee and Judge Belinda Griffin was selected as the training council representative. Finally, the 8th district discussed the districts responsibility for hosting the probate judges hospitality room at the training seminar in April. The 8th district currently meets four times per year.

District Meetings

7TH DISTRICT NOTES

Members of the 7th District met March 6, 2002, at Judge Greg Grayson's office at the Catoosa County Probate Court, Ringgold, GA. Those in attendance were: Judge Greg Grayson (Catoosa Cty), Judge Jan Ellison (Dade Cty), Judge Johnny Parker (Gordon Cty), Judge Dale Adams (Murray Cty), Judge Foye L. Johnson (Walker Cty), Ms. Christy Anderson (Walker Cty), Judge Ray Broadrick (Whitfield Cty), Ms. Linda White, (Whitfield Cty), and Mr. Robbie Foote of the Administrative Office of the Courts.

Prior to the meeting, the members of the 7th district were informed of Judge Eddie Husley's grandmother's death. Our deepest sympathy goes out to Eddie and his family. Johnny Parker, Director of the 7th district, called the meeting to order.

The minutes of the last meeting were discussed. Robbie Foote, as a representative of the AOC discussed House Bills 571, 917, 1136 and Senate Bill 32 with the members that were present.

Following discussion of old and new business for the district, Judge Dale Adams was elected to the position of district director. Judge Greg Grayson and Judge Deborah Anderson were elected to vice-chair and secretary respectively.

The meeting was adjourned and followed by a group lunch in Catoosa County.

10TH DISTRICT PROBATE JUDGES MEETING JANUARY 24, 2002

The Tenth District probate judges met in Hart County at the State Parole Office. with Judge Bob Smith as the host. Members of the tenth District present were Denise Dallas, Susan Tate, Jim Burton, Margaret Deadwyler, Betty Thomas, Pat Hardaway, Martha Mayo, Greg Adams, Eddie Fowler, Bob Smith, Henry Baker, David Anglin, Beverly Nation, Tammy Brown, Hoppy Royston. District Director Hoppy Royston welcomed everyone and opened the meeting with prayer.

Judge Bob Smith, who was sporting a large wound with approximately 25 stitches, opened the meeting with a story about his experience hitting a deer on the way to his son's graduation in Forsyth. Following Judge Smith's anecdote, the treasurer's report for the District was distributed and approved as presented.

Judge Judy Mullis, head of the CPCJ elections committee, discussed SB 32. It was her wish to get a better perspective of how many judges wanted to oppose the bill, let the bill go, or had no preference either way. Of the fifteen judges in attendance, eleven handle elections. In a unanimous vote the tenth district voted to oppose SB 32. The district also voted (14-1) to give up elections if a proposal was presented that would be acceptable to all counties, regardless of size. Some concern over the manner in which this bill would establish election board members was voiced.

Many of the judges believed that there is a mechanism in place for any county that wants an election board (OCGA§ 21-2-40). Monterey issues and accountability of election boards were also issues raised by district members. Judge Royston gave a description of the election they observed in Suwanee with the new electronic voting system.

The next issue that was discussed involved the Discharge of Personal Representative. There was discussion on contacting beneficiaries under a will and all heirs under an Administration. It was decided a guardian may sign for a minor under this proceeding.

Judge Pat Hardaway reported that the Chief Justice addressed the General Assembly recently and strongly encouraged them to consider Nonpartisan elections for Probate Judges and District Attorneys. Judge Jim Burton advised Election Superintendents that they needed to be sworn in each election cycle (every two years) according to OCGA § 21-2-70 (14).

The recent case involving "Shaver v. City of Peachtree City" involves Possession of Marijuana being put on a Uniform Traffic Citation. Henry Baker reported that he sent a copy to his prosecutor, who in turn put it on an accusation. This would allow the case to remain in Probate Court. He also believes that it may work to have the defendant sign a waiver to submit to the jurisdiction of the Probate Court and acknowledge they are waiving their right to a jury trial.

Many common issues confronting the Probate Courts were discussed among the district members. Judge Tammy Brown asked a question regarding a Guardianship case. Her question concerned a family member that was not a party to the case, the family member's attorney continued to make objections. Judge Tate advised that his clients would be considered a witness and could be sequestered as a witness and that

Thank You!

I wish to thank all of the Probate Judges and Election Boards that remembered me with your cards and letters the past three weeks while I was recuperating from my heart attack. The beautiful flowers from the Probate Judges Council, while I was in the hospital, I enjoyed so much. The fruit basket from the Tenth District Probate Judges upon my arrival home was very pretty and tasty.

Please know it warms my heart to know I was remembered by a wonderful, caring, outstanding organization. May God bless each of you is my prayer.

Thanks Again,
Lucy Bryant, Warren County Probate Judge

continued on page 6

Summary of Minutes — CPCJ Executive

Judge Buttrill called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Budget Report

• Mr. Foote reported on the Council's state funding as of December 31, 2001. He explained that funds have been moved from the "other operating expenses" account in to the "rents other than real-estate" account to cover the cost of past and future meetings. Currently, the Council has approximately \$48,000 in state funding, but will need to pay almost \$20,000 for contractual fees in the near future.

• In Judge Cranford's absence, Judge Buttrill gave a report on the Council's private funds. As of February 1, 2002, the Council has \$89,231.88 in their account. The report also included an itemized list of the checks that have been written by the Council. Judge Self stated that this had been the first year that dues from every county had been collected. Dues statements for the upcoming year have just been sent and the Council hopes to repeat this achievement.

Committee Reports

• Court Rules and Forms: Judge Propst discussed the necessary changes that need to be made to the probate rules regarding motions (Rule 6) and leave of absences (Rule 14). He also discussed the Supreme Courts rule for interpreters and its possible adoption into the probate rules. A motion for Judge Propst and Judge Buttrill to review the rules, make any amendments necessary, and submit them on behalf of the CPCJ, was made, seconded, and unanimously approved.

• Video Project: Judge Guess reported that the video was in the final stages of production and that a draft copy of the video would be sent by Dan Sperling to the members of the committee in the near future. He commended the hard work of the committee members, particularly the dedication and input provided by Judge Brown and Judge Tate.

• Training Council: Judge Baker reported that plans for the April meeting in Augusta have been made. Ms. Sherry Carson with the ICJE has a list of the topics that will be discussed at that time. The winter training topics that will be presented on February 6 will be a session on evidence, new legislation, and a presentation by the new director of the AOC, Mr. David Ratley.

• Legislative Committee: Judge Bracewell directed the attention of the executive committee to a list of the proposed legislation for this session. He also complimented Mr. Rodatus, the Council's Legislative Intern, on his work thus far assisting the Probate Council. Judge Bracewell continued his report by updating the committee on pertinent bills that are being tracked by the CPCJ. Among the bills discussed were HB 571 - Probate Judges Retirement Bill, HB 639 - Wills Revised Code (deadbeat dads), HB646- Wills Renunciation of Future Interest, HB 917 - Standby Guardianship Act, HB 691 - Firearms Permits, Less than an ounce of Marijuana, HB 1103 - Bans Contributions from Lawyers and Law Firms, SR 520 - To establish a study committee regarding Judicial elections, HB 1142 - Changes Victim Compensation Code and HB1064 - Changes Population Required for Lawyers P.J./Expanded Jurisdiction.

Other bills of particular interest to the executive committee were:

• SR 188 - Nonpartisan Probate Judges Bill is currently in the State and Local Government Operations Committee. Ms. Moore added that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court spoke in favor of this bill in his address to the legislature last month. Judge Buttrill stated that the Council also presented this bill to the Judicial Council in December where it was well received by those in attendance. This bill will take the collective efforts of all probate judges in order for it to be passed.

• HB1136 - Presumption of Death is a proposed piece of legislation that is in

response to the recent tragedies in New York City. Judge Self explained that this bill is to anticipate such an event in the state of Georgia that would necessitate the ability to make a deceleration of death when a physical body can not be found. The executive committee expressed their continued support of this legislation in light of recent events.

• Judge Ogletree also discussed some of the proposed traffic legislation. She stated that SR 489 would propose a constitutional amendment for the use of additional penalty fees for a pedestrian and traffic safety program. She believes that the Council will eventually need to take a stand on this issue. It has been her understanding that the Council's position has been to oppose any additional add-ons. Judge Bracewell stated that he would like to make a motion to that effect. The motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

The magistrate court bill which would provide jurisdiction to the magistrate court over all misdemeanors was also discussed by the executive committee. Judge Ogletree explained that this bill may not currently have a direct impact on probate courts, but the bill could potentially effect the courts in the future. Judge Greene suggested that perhaps the Council would like to pursue concurrent jurisdiction on this same bill. The Council discussed these issues and decided to have the traffic committee investigate these bills and report back to the executive committee.

• SB 32 - Mandates combined Boards of Election and Registration has passed the Senate and is in the House Government Affairs Committee. Judge Mullis, who has worked on this bill on a personal basis, suggested that there should be a compromise on this issue which would allow for local legislation to be introduced. This would allow probate judges to continue to handle elections if the county would like them to. The Council decided to take no official position on this bill.

Committee — February 5, 2002

• Judge Buttrill and Judge Bracewell introduced the new proposal for the Council's use of a lobbyist. At the last meeting, the Council unanimously approved the use of a lobbyist on an "as needed basis," for a cost of \$3,000-\$5,000. Judge Greene and Judge Bracewell met with the Boller, Sewell & Segars, Inc. lobbying group and have discussed the cost for their services. After some discussion, they agreed to assist the Council year round as their lobbyist for \$1,000 per month for two years. The contract would also allow for a thirty day cancellation if the Council was not pleased with their services. The Executive Committee discussed the advantages of using the lobbying firm and came to the consensus that the Council would benefit greatly from this proposal. A motion for the Council to enter into a two year contract for the proposed cost was made, seconded, and unanimously

approved. The lobbying firm will begin representing the Council this session.

• Nominations and Recognition Committee: Judge McCoy reported that the nomination forms for Probate Judge of the Year and the Special Recognition Award have been sent to all probate judges. A list of past winners was also included in the mailing. Ms. Murphy will be receiving the nominations and tallying the votes for the nominations and recognition committee.

New Business/Old Business

• Judge Buttrill stated that a conference call will be set up for late February or early March to discuss nominations for officers. He requested that each district please notify the AOC of there new district director.

• Judge Cason announced that the membership pins would be ready by the April meeting and that the newsletter and district director programs are proving to be a success. Judge Buttrill add that Judge Cason had been elected to the position of Secretary/Treasurer for the County Officers Association of Georgia (COAG). In other COAG news, Judge Greene announced that he and another probate judge to a fine committee, in response to the recent auditor's report.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

The next meeting of the executive committee will be held during the Spring meeting, on April 16, 2002, at the Radisson Hotel in Augusta, GA.

District Meetings *continued*

since his clients were not a party to the case he was out of order to behave in that manner. The attorney would be allowed to ask questions of the witnesses.

There was discussion regarding No Administration Necessary and Years' Support regarding the minor's interest in real estate when the minor became of age. They do not lose their interest and they would have to quit claim their interest in the property.

The district members also discussed the possession of a pistol firearm by a person under 21 years of age, in a vehicle. The members present decided the under age person can have it in their vehicle as long as it is in view and the firearm was separate from the ammunition

A few courts had received a call from the FBI regarding proof of an applicant of U.S. citizenship when they apply for a gun permit. It was decided the FBI should supply the federal statute that pertains to this. If this is correct either a copy of a

birth certificate or naturalization papers would suffice.

Finally, the district members discussed the technicalities of a bond on a defendant when the case is transferred to Superior Court. It was decided the bond follows the defendant. Notify the bond company and

if they want to be released from the bond it is the bond company's responsibility to bring the defendant back to be re-bonded to Superior Court.

Following these discussions, the Tenth District reelected Judge Hoppy Royston of Madison County to the position of District Director. Judge Lillis Brown, Rockdale County, was elected Secretary and Judge Jim Burton, Wilkes County, was elected Treasurer.

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded and unanimously approved. The next meeting will be held on May 16, 2002 (3rd Thursday) in Oconee County, hosted by David Anglin.



Tenth District Meeting • Hart County, Jan. 24, 2002

Left to Right: Henry Baker, Beverly Nation, Susan Tate, Martha Mayo, Hoppy Royston, Tammy Brown, David Anglin, Greg Adams, Betty Thomas, Pat Hardaway, Eddy Fowler, Margaret Deadwyler, Denise Dallas, Bob Smith, Jim Burton

Improvements to Probate Court Made Possible Through Recent Grant Proposals



Judge Ken Van Horn of the Chattahoochee County Probate Court recently received a grant to streamline and update his document management system. After years of continued use, Judge Van Horn wanted to ensure the safety and protection of the counties important documents (such as minute and docket books, marriage licenses and other public records) while still providing access to genealogists and other constituents of the court. Judge Van Horn's grant will allow for the creation of a small program written in Microsoft Access that could be used by genealogist in indexing the files with document imaging in TIFF IV format. The indexing and image would then be importable into the SUSTAIN and PCIS systems currently supported by the Georgia Courts

Automation Commission (GCAC) as well as the database of the Georgia Department of Archives and History. This program can in turn be downloaded as free software for the public domain and will allow for the original to remain in the county's vault, while copies will be easily accessed through personal computers.

In Carroll County, Judge Betty Cason has also received a grant for the preservation of historical records and documents in her county. Through a competitive grant process, which includes the submission of a needs assessment for the court, an overview of the proposed project, and a budget for the project, the Georgia Department of Archives and History has given two grants to the Carroll County probate court. These grants, totaling \$9,500.00,

have allowed for the purchase of a scanning system which allows the court to scan records to computer disk. This process now allows for a more permanent preservation of the counties records and eliminates the need for the traditional recording books.

If you have a proposal or an idea that you believe will benefit your court, contact Ms. Cynthia Clanton, General Counsel and Assistant Director for Grants, Partnerships and Outreach Programs, for assistance and details on how to receive funding to improve your court!

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The Gavel

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